

# NATASHA LESTER

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF  
*THE PARIS SEAMSTRESS*

*The*  
**RIVIERA  
HOUSE**

A Paris spy.  
A secret code.  
A daring plan.



Reader's  
Guide





# Behind *The Riviera House*



Those of you who've read my previous books know how important the historical research is to me, and that I always visit the places where my books are set – and not just because I like to travel to France! *The Riviera House* was no exception and I hope this brief look behind the scenes at the research and travel I undertook gives you lots to discuss with your book club.

## Getting Started - A Riviera House and Rose Valland

Back in early 2018, I read a book called *The Riviera Set* by Mary S. Lovell. It was a narrative about American actress Maxine Elliott and her famous Chateau de l'Horizon near Antibes in France. I knew immediately that I wanted to write a book about a wonderful house on the French Riviera, a house with a complicated history, a mansion that might be resurrected and redeemed sometime in the future. But I didn't yet know what story I would weave around this house nor who might occupy it.

Not long after, I heard of Rose Valland and was intrigued by the idea of a woman risking her life to save artworks during the war. I love art, I love French history and I love tales of daring women from the past. So I decided that Rose's story, and the story of what happened at the Jeu de Paume Museum in Paris during the war, might be worth looking into further. The more I looked, the more I knew I wanted to base my next book around this chapter in history.

## Paris: Art, Archives, Galleries and Markets

This decision meant I had several different strands to research: the titular house, Rose Valland herself, the Jeu de Paume museum, the theft of artworks from Jewish families and Hermann Göring's involvement in those thefts. So I jumped onto a plane to France and spent most of December 2018 and January 2019 there.

I started in Paris at the Louvre, searching out some of the key paintings that were stolen by Hitler and Göring during the war, including Vermeer's *Astronomer*. Knowing its complicated history and how it had suffered dur-

ing the war gave me a quite different appreciation for the work. I also spent quite some time admiring the *Winged Victory of Samothrace*, imagining her being winched down the Daru staircase and thinking about what it might feel like to witness such a strange spectacle on the brink of another world war.

I visited the Jeu de Paume museum next. The exterior is exactly the same as in Rose's time although the interior is quite different. But my online research had turned up a floor plan from the Second World War period so, armed with this, I was able to get my bearings in the museum and see precisely where the *Salle des Martrys* was located. That area of the museum still feels haunted, I must say.

The National Archives in Paris holds numerous papers about the evacuation of the Louvre and Jacques Jaujard's mission to manage the artworks in all the different depots around France and the role of the Jeu de Paume as triage, storage and transit facility for thousands of stolen art treasures. Most fascinating to see was some of the correspondence between Rose Valland and Monsieur Jaujard from that time.

I discovered the petite and lovely Galerie Véro-Dodat shopping arcade when I was in Paris in 2016 and I was captivated by a spiral staircase that could be glimpsed from the archway of a portal bearing the words 33 Escalier. As soon as I sat down to write *The Riviera House*, I knew Éliane would live at the apartment at the top of those stairs. If you're ever in Paris, make sure you visit the Galerie and search out that staircase!

My final stop, all in the name of research, was the Marché aux Puces de Saint-Ouen that Remy and the Henry-Jones family visit in the book. I'd spent some time at the Marché many years before, but you always see a place with different eyes when you visit for research, so off I went. And yes, the Marché Paul Bert Serpette really does sell everything from stuffed lions to staircases!

## On to the French Riviera

If you've read my previous book *The Paris Secret*, you might recall that in the book club notes I mentioned driving all over Cornwall searching for the perfect seaside village. Well, I did much the same for *The Riviera*

## ~ Behind *The Riviera House* ~

*House*, except this time I drove from one side of the French Riviera to the other!

I started around Juan Les Pins and Antibes where Maxine Elliott's house was located. I even stayed in a hotel that had once been the villa where Zelda and F. Scott Fitzgerald lived, and where he wrote *Tender Is the Night*. I'll do anything to get myself into the right mood for research!

But those towns didn't have the right feel. It might sound odd that even though I didn't know exactly where on the Riviera I wanted to set part of the story, I knew exactly how that place would feel, what kind of mood it would have, what type of ambience it would possess. And as soon as I drove to Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat, I knew that I'd found my setting.

I had mainly gone to the town to visit the Villa Ephrussi de Rothschild, as I'd hoped it might inspire the house in my story and boy, did it ever! You can safely say that Remy's house in the book is an exact replica of the Villa Ephrussi de Rothschild. What a magnificent house it is! And the gardens are simply superb.

But I made one important change. The villa is located quite a distance from the water, whereas I wanted my house to be right on the water. And when I went for a walk around the Promenade des Fossettes, a craggy coastal path that encircles a small peninsula near the Cap, I knew I would place my house there. It's such a beautiful part of the world, sea all around, secluded beaches, sweeping views of the coastline, and incredibly private houses occupying large tracts of land. When I'm a billionaire, I'll be buying myself one! If you're ever in the area, walk around to Paloma Plage (Paloma Beach). I imagined the house in the book to be situated just to the east.

From there, I began to explore all the nearby towns and simply fell in love with Èze, which is just as I describe it in the book: the perfect place to get lost in, especially if accompanied by someone like Adam! It is one of the few ancient perched villages on the Riviera, so called

because they are quite literally perched on top of hills, affording them an excellent view over the water and the advantage of remaining small and picturesque.

### And the Less Glamorous Research

As well as the traveling, there is the far less glamorous but equally important task of sifting through historical records, including much documentation from the war, now held at the National Archives in Maryland.

Many of the characters in the book are based on real people, including Colonel von Behr and, of course, Hermann Göring. Archives are the best places to learn more about such people as the records they hold are primary sources, not colored by the passing of years or one author's interpretation. So I based my development of these characters around the Consolidated Interrogation Reports I found in the National Archives. A consolidated interrogation report is much what it sounds like: a collection of the many different interviews (or interrogations) conducted by the specialist Art Looting Unit of the US Armed Forces with people connected to the wartime art thefts and also the Jeu de Paume. It was quite shocking to see what some of the guilty parties said to try to get themselves out of trouble or to shift the blame onto others.

To conclude, I hope that gives you some more background to the book, and to my research. Most of all, I hope you enjoy reading *The Riviera House* and that you enjoy discussing it with your book club. I also recommend that you, like Remy and Adam, indulge in some champagne when you meet and perhaps enjoy some food from the Provence-Alpes-Côtes-d'Azur region of France, where Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat is located. It's a region heavily influenced by its proximity to Italy and you might want to try socca, a street-food staple, much like a flatbread, or pissaladière, very similar to what we call pizza. *Bon appétit!*





# Cast of Characters



## Éliane Dufort

A beautiful twenty-year-old Parisienne who is as passionate about her art as she is about caring for her four sisters. But when war breaks out, Éliane has to put aside her artistic dreams and instead find within herself reserves of bravery and resilience she never knew she had.

## Xavier Laurent

The charismatic and successful son of an art dealer who comes to Paris to further his father's business interests. He finds himself drawn to Éliane by a shared love of art. But is he as trustworthy as he seems? War has made traitors of stronger men than him, after all.

## Rose Valland

The quiet and unassuming art curator who is made to work as the caretaker of a museum taken over by Nazis. No one would ever suspect this mouse of a woman of putting her life on the line to defy the brutal regime. Her strength lies in her ability to hide in plain sight.

## Luc Dufort

An aspiring artist, Éliane's older brother dreams of being one of the greats. But he prefers to spend his time drinking and carousing the bars of Montparnasse. Will war strengthen his character or harden his vices?

## Angelique Dufort

Éliane's younger sister is feisty and idealistic, even in the face of war. She hates the Nazis and, driven by her youthful zeal, will do whatever it takes to defeat them – damn the consequences.

## Monsieur Jacques Jaujard

As Director of the National Museums in France, this dignified and kindly man has the weight of the world on his shoulders as he fights to save France's cultural heritage, while also protecting Rose Valland and the Duforts.

## Remy Lang

A glamorous vintage-fashionista who flees to Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat to escape her traumatic past. The last thing she wants is to go digging up her family history, and she certainly has no intention of falling in love. But amid the luxury of the French Riviera, she discovers that moving on from the past involves delving deeply back into it.

## Adam Henry-Jones

For this aloof, jet-setting fashion photographer, a summer on the French Riviera is a chance to heal a family rift and leave his bitterness behind. But when he meets the broken and beautiful Remy Lang, he finds himself absorbed. She's the photograph he can't look away from.





# The Riviera House Guide to Paris



You might not be traveling as much as usual right now, but we can all visit the places of our dreams in our imaginations. To make those dreams as real as possible, I've put together this armchair guide to some of the key locations in Paris that feature in *The Riviera House*. *Bon voyage!*

## The Musée du Louvre

The world's largest art museum and home to the *Mona Lisa*, this centuries-old former palace sits on the right bank of the Seine. During World War II, it really was closed for three days while the artworks were relocated to the French countryside to keep them safe. Nowadays, you can see many of the pieces from *The Riviera House* inside the museum, including Vermeer's *Astronomer* and the *Winged Victory of Samothrace*. For art-loving Éliane Dufort, the Louvre is where she first becomes embroiled in the effort to save France's masterpieces.

## Jardins de Tuileries

A centuries-old public garden, the Tuileries is located right next to the Louvre and should be the next stop on your real or imaginary tour. Created by Catherine de' Medici as a palace garden, you'll find ponds, a labyrinth and grotto within. In *The Riviera House*, the network of chestnut trees and fountains become a safe place for Éliane to meet with her co-conspirators.

## Jeu de Paume

Follow Éliane's footsteps as she makes that first mysterious walk from the Louvre, through the Jardins de Tuileries, to the Jeu de Paume in the north corner. This little gem of a museum began life as a tennis court for Napoleon III but in the early 20th century became an overflow space for the Louvre. For German-speaking Éliane, working at the Jeu de Paume provides the perfect opportunity to help Rose Valland secretly track stolen artworks.

## Place de la Concorde

Step out of the Jeu de Paume and onto the largest square in the French capital, with a 3,000-year-old Egyptian obelisk at its centre. The Place de la Concorde is also the

backdrop against which Remy and Éliane, separated by time, experience heartbreak and connection. See if you can find the chapters in the book where each woman crosses through the square.

## Café Marly

Retrace your steps to the Louvre, as you must be hungry by now! Located beneath the arcades of the Louvre, Café Marly is the archetypal French bistro where you can enjoy a glass of red wine and a stunning view of the Louvre pyramid. It's also the place where Remy makes a vital decision about tracing her family history – and contemplates moving on with her life.

## Galerie Véro-Dodat

Head north from the Louvre to one of Paris's few surviving *passages couverts*. The Galerie Véro-Dodat is a marble columned, black-and-white-tiled, covered passageway where the wealthy would once have dined and shopped in comfort – before it lost its luster in the early twentieth century. These days, it houses luxury brands, such as shoemaker Christian Louboutin, but you can still see the staircase leading up to Éliane's apartment near the brasserie.

## Le Marché aux Puces de Saint-Ouen

You'll need to take the Metro for this next stop. A sprawling network of alleyways, the Marché aux Puces de Saint-Ouen is the largest antiques and second-hand market in the world. For vintage fashionista Remy Lang, it's a treasure trove of finds – from armor and chandeliers at the Marché Paul Bert Serpette to vintage Chanel gowns at the Marché Jules Vallès and the antique maps of Marché Vernaison.



# The Riviera House Guide to France



The French Riviera is exactly as you hope it might be – chic, summery, and overflowing with quaint villages and glamorous mansions. Pull on your swimsuit and pour yourself a cocktail; here are some of the best places to visit from the book.

## Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat

A charming waterfront village with sweeping views over the sea. In town, the Villa Ephrussi de Rothschild, a candy-pink Renaissance-style villa, serves as the inspiration for Remy's hideaway in *The Riviera House*. Plan to spend the day exploring both the house and the gardens, either online or in real life!

## Èze

If you could create a fairy-tale French village, then it would closely resemble Èze. Perched atop a hill, with an abundance of blue shutters, ivy-covered walls, and narrow cobblestone streets, this special place inspires Remy to share something of her past history with Adam.

## Cours Saleya, Nice

Boasting distinctive red-and-white-striped awnings, this thriving market in the old quarter of Nice is always bustling with activity and is a great place to browse for food, produce, flowers and vintage fashion. Like Adam in *The Riviera House*, you can take a short detour northward to Place du Palais de Justice if antique and second-hand books are more to your liking.





# The Riviera House Book Club Menu



## To Drink

Like Remy and Adam, I recommend you indulge in some champagne when you meet with your book club. You could also try some classic Riviera Cassis – but not too much!

## To Eat

Enjoy some food from the Provence-Alpes-Côtes-d'Azur region of France where Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat is located. It's an area heavily influenced by its proximity to Italy meaning socca, a street-food staple – much like a flatbread – should be on the menu. Alternatively, use this recipe to throw together a pissaladière, which is very similar to what we call pizza.

## Pissaladière Recipe

### INGREDIENTS

Several sheets of ready-rolled puff pastry  
25g butter  
800g onions, thinly sliced  
2 garlic cloves, thinly sliced  
2 tbsp fresh thyme leaves  
2 ripe tomatoes, coarsely chopped  
1 tsp sugar  
12 anchovy fillets  
16 black olives, halved

### METHOD

Heat butter in a large frying pan on low heat. Add onions, garlic and sugar and fry until the onions are very soft but not browned. This will take around 30 minutes.

Add the thyme and tomato and cook for a further ten minutes. Remove pan from heat and set aside.

Preheat the oven to 390 F (200 C). Use a knife to score a border about half an inch from the edge of the pastry.

Spoon the onion mixture inside the border and spread evenly over the pastry. Place the anchovies atop the onion mixture in a lattice or diamond pattern, with an olive in the centre of each diamond.

Bake for 25-30 minutes until golden. Cut into squares and serve.



Bon appétit!





# Discussion Questions



1. Before reading the book, did you know about the theft of artworks from Jewish families in Paris by the Nazis during WWII? Had you heard of Rose Valland and her role as art saviour? Why do you think the story of these paintings, and that of their protector Rose Valland, is a less well-known aspect of wartime history? Did reading *The Riviera House* make you want to find out more about Rose?
2. Éliane asks her brother if, after the war, they will be judged by others and whether “instead of saving paintings, we should be saving people.” What do you think? Were the paintings worth the danger of spying on the Germans? Should her efforts and Rose’s efforts have been focused on rescuing people rather than rescuing artworks? What is the value of a piece of art?
3. In the Author’s Note at the end of the book, Natasha Lester explains that Rose Valland came by *Göring’s Catalogue* sometime after 1944, kept it a secret, and that the catalogue was only discovered after her death. Why do you think Rose didn’t share the catalogue more widely? Should she have? What might have impelled her to keep it a secret?
4. Like Natasha Lester’s other books, *The Riviera House* mixes real people and real events with fictitious people and fictional events. What do you think of this approach to writing historical fiction? Is it wrong to create a narrative around Rose Valland and then change some of the events and insert people into those events who didn’t exist? Or can this way of telling a story bring the events of the past to life and ensure these events and people reach a wider audience so that more people can learn from and about history?
5. One of the themes of the book is about what makes a culture - is it the people, the language, the artworks, the buildings, the collective spirit – and whether war can destroy a culture or make it stronger. “So many things worth preserving have been ruined,” Xavier says to Éliane at one point. Why does war ruin some people and bring out the best in others? What parts of your culture are worth preserving and would you fight to protect them?
6. In the contemporary narrative, did you enjoy visiting the towns of Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat and Èze? Which elements of this narrative were your favorite? Being introduced to the photography of Lousie Dahl-Wolfe? Remy and Adam’s love story? Remy’s journey through grief and to a new way of understanding both herself and her past? Something else?
7. Remy’s home on the French Riviera is based on the Villa Ephrussi de Rothschild in Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat. Google some pictures of the house and discuss how the two houses are similar and different. Did reading about the house bring it to life in the same way as the pictures do? Does it look how you imagined it might?
8. Matt and Adam have a complicated relationship. Is Adam always understanding of his brother’s pain or does Adam inflame the situation? Or is Matt solely to blame for their conflict? When could both of the brothers have behaved differently toward each other and thus improved their relationship?
9. Should Elke have done more to help Éliane and to actively work against her husband – or was Elke in an impossible situation? Most especially, do you think Elke could have done something toward the end of the book to ensure the baby stayed with Éliane? Or would that have placed the baby in too much danger?

# About the Author



**NATASHA LESTER** is the *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Paris Seamstress*, *The Paris Orphan* and *The Paris Secret*, and a former marketing executive for L'Oréal.

When she's not writing, she loves collecting vintage fashion (Dior is a favorite!), practicing the art of fashion illustration, learning about fashion history—and traveling to Paris. Natasha lives with her husband and three children in Perth, Western Australia.



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# Praise for *The Riviera House*



“*The Riviera House* is a poignant meditation on loss and the courage it takes to start over. A stark reminder of how the past influences the present, the novel kept me up at night, turning the pages faster and faster, in order to be with its heroine Remy as she solved the mystery of an enigmatic painting and learned what happened to the *Résistants* who risked their lives to help others.”

—JANET SKESLIEN CHARLES, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Paris Library*

“A poignant and gripping story of love, sacrifice, and the power of art to shape history and embolden the human spirit in its darkest moments. Beautifully rendered and exquisitely detailed, *The Riviera House* is another stunning, spellbinding novel from Natasha Lester. Her best yet!”

—CHANEL CLEETON, *New York Times* bestselling author of  
*The Most Beautiful Girl in Cuba*

“In her captivating exploration of the Nazis’ ruthless plunder of artwork during World War II and the daring, brilliant women who helped save priceless masterpieces, Natasha Lester has opened a door to the past that readers will not soon forget. By interweaving a beautifully told historic tale with a compelling modern-day narrative, *The Riviera House* explores how beholden the present is to the women of the past.”

—MARIE BENEDICT, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Mystery of Mrs. Christie*

“Beautifully written and intimately researched, *The Riviera House* weaves an intriguing and wonderfully imagined path between WW2 Paris and modern-day French Riviera. Fans of historical fiction and dual-timeline novels will be mesmerized as connections are slowly revealed, building toward a heart-wrenching finale. Magnifique!”

—HAZEL GAYNOR, *New York Times* bestselling author of *When We Were Young & Brave*

“With satin smooth prose and a plotline of intricate lacework, Natasha Lester tailors a sophisticated showstopper of a novel. Powerful and moving, with important things to say about the value of art to humanity, *Riviera House* is a gorgeous novel, journey and destination.”

—STEPHANIE DRAY, *New York Times* bestselling author of *My Dear Hamilton*

“*The Riviera House* is a love letter to art in all its forms, with beautiful prose and immeasurable heart.”

—ERIKA ROBUCK, national bestselling author of *The Invisible Woman*

CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE

## ~ Praise for *The Riviera House* ~

“Art lovers and fashionistas alike will be glued to this emotional page-turner about the women who safeguarded Paris’s treasures during the German occupation. Natasha Lester has done it again with this thrilling tale that reveals what sacrifices one woman is willing to make for love and for art.”

—KAIA ALDERSON, author of *Sisters in Arms*

“Delectable and daring, *The Riviera House* takes readers from wartime Paris to the sun-soaked French Riviera and beyond, populating its world with fabulous fashion, unforgettable characters, vibrant masterpieces — and intrigue at every turn.”

—BRYN TURNBULL, author of *The Woman Before Wallis*

“A vivid, nuanced and deeply moving depiction of women’s courage in the face of unimaginable danger, sacrifice and loss. *The Riviera House* is a gripping story of a young woman who risks her life to record the Nazi’s pillage of fine artworks during World War II, and the repercussions of her actions down the years, as her legacy helps another woman in her greatest hour of need. A superlative work of historical fiction—Natasha Lester’s finest yet!

—CHRISTINE WELLS, author of *Sisters of the Resistance*

“A gripping and heartbreaking tale sweeping from Nazi-occupied Paris to the sun-kissed coast of southern France, *The Riviera House* is a story that will stay with me for a long time. A rich and satisfying read, as multi-layered as the paint on Éliane’s treasured artworks or the threads in Remy’s antique dresses. Tres bien!”

—POSY LOVELL, author of *The Kew Gardens Girls*

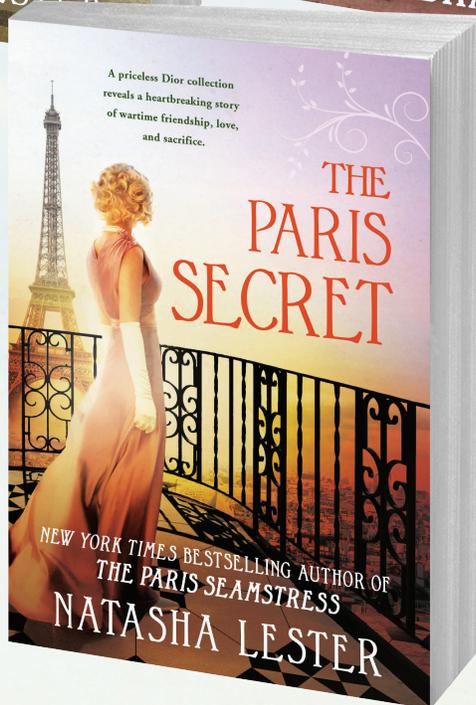
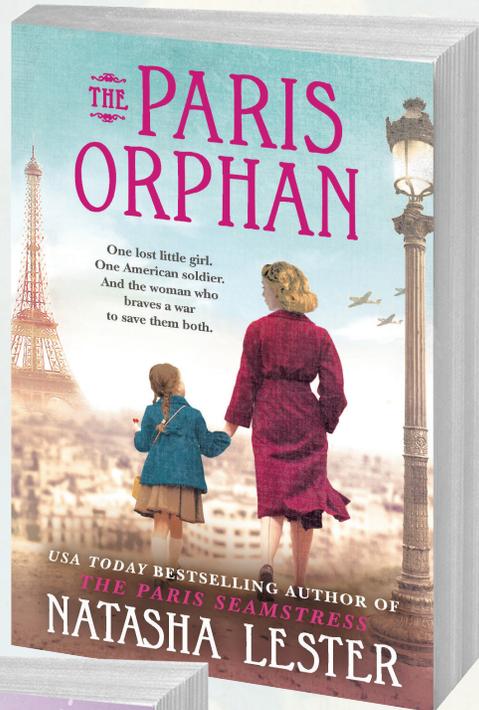
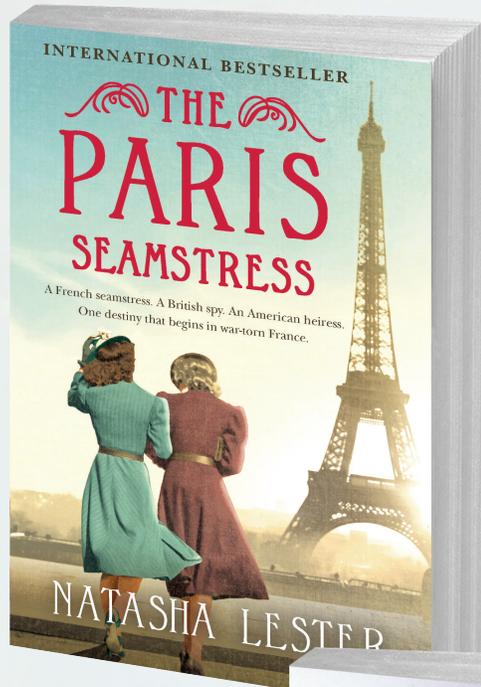
“Suspense, intrigue and self-sacrifice are at the heart of this fascinating story about artwork stolen by the Nazis, based on real people and true events.”

—RUTH DRUART, author of *While Paris Slept*

“Natasha Lester’s *The Riviera House* unites the glittering French Riviera with the darkest days of World War II Paris, creating a page-turning story of love, loss, and redemption. Lester deftly weaves dual timelines, hopping between a harrowing account of Nazi art theft in occupied Paris, and a modern tale of grief and healing. This is a heartfelt celebration of love, art’s power to inspire humanity, and the courage of those who risked their lives for both. Memorable and compelling!”

—KRISTIN BECK, Author of *Courage My Love*

More books by Natasha Lester



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